

The Best Things are Easy to Destroy by dawniekins18

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Summary:

Jonathan never thought Nancy Wheeler would look twice at him. Imagine his surprise when Steve Harrington starts holding his hand.

1. Chapter 1

Jonathan never thought Nancy Wheeler would look twice at him. Sure, their brothers were best friends, but that only meant he saw her every third month when he picked up his brother. Back then, Will usually rode his bike home, and she was always at the library with Barb.

A lot of things are different now.

Monster hunting together changed them- and not only their relationship. What happened one random night in November, had made them all different.

“Maybe if we put a tarp inside and outside, and, I don’t know, put a bookshelf in front of it? Think that would help?”

“Sounds like a plan.” Jonathan agrees, nodding to his mom. The hole in their wall is making the house feel like a freezer, and they are troubleshooting ways to make it warmer now that the temperature has dropped to the low teens.

“I can nail that sheet of wood I found on the outside with the tarp too. I checked on the insulation at the hardware store, but I didn’t have enough to buy it.”

“Old clothes? Newspaper? Do we have any extra wood for the inside?”

“Maybe. Let’s see what’s around the house. I can keep my eye out for a second scrap.”

The two of them spend the morning maneuvering around and freezing their asses off trying to put the wall back together. After three hours, the draft that’s been breezing into their living room is considerably less noticeable.

“The wash cloths were a nice touch.”

“Byers are handy folk,” his mom responds with a friendly smirk.

The sudden knock on their door makes them both jump, and Jonathan hates how scared his mom still is. How scared they both are. Their house is a weird mixture of relief, love, and barely contained terror.

“Who could that be?” Mom’s voice is nervous and her gaze darts to Will’s door where he’s still sleeping. He knows that for certain because they’ve both checked on him at least three times each.

“I have no clue.” He hates that he has to work up the courage, but he finally is able to swing open the door. On the doorstep stands Nancy and Mike Wheeler, and for a reason that completely mystifies him—Steve Harrington.

“Hi.” She says with a small smile.

“Hi.”

“Is Will here?” Mike butts in impatiently.

“Yeah,” Jonathan answers, shooting a glance toward his mom, “he’s still asleep though.”

“That’s fine. I can wake him up.” He shoots past him, banging through his brother’s bedroom door.

Mom lets out a nervous laugh at the antics of twelve year old boys. He can feel how uncomfortable she is. They’ve both drawn back from other people, hiding away in their damaged house. They’ve cocooned Will, holding him close while they try to piece back the broken parts that fractured over the week he was...gone.

“Come on in Nancy. You too, Steve. You two want something to drink? I have some orange juice or I can make coffee. There is water too, of course.” She’s rambling, and her anxiety is seeping over him and through the room.

Nancy smiles again and cautiously comes inside, Steve following close behind her. Jonathan steps back, closing the door behind them.

They both look around with carefully blank expressions. Over the past couple of weeks, they’ve cleaned up most of the damage, but the

carpets still a mess. And they can't afford paint or wallpaper for the walls until Mom gets her Christmas bonus. It's clean though, and Will is here. The rest hasn't mattered much to either of them.

But in this moment, Jonathan can't help but feel that familiar tinge of shame. The shame that's followed him all his life. He's not ashamed of this house or his mother, but he always feels like other people think he should be. And the feeling those people give off is contagious.

"Coffee would be great Mrs. Byers. Thanks for offering." Steve's energy is relaxed while he takes a seat on the couch, making himself at home.

"Yeah, thanks. That'd be lovely." Nancy also takes a seat and now Jonathan is standing alone, gaping at the two of them.

"Please, call me Joyce. After everything... well, let's just say we're on a first name basis." She fidgets for a moment before remembering her offer of coffee, then she disappears into the kitchen.

Jonathan continues to stand, staring silently at them, more than a little confused.

"Join us, Byers. We don't bite."

"Mike wanted to see Will, and ask your mom if he could come over. Your phone is still acting strange." Nancy adds as he takes the spot at the very end of the couch, furthest away from them.

They leave it unhooked because the ringing freaks his mom out so much- it's easier to avoid it happening whenever possible.

"Yeah." He doesn't elaborate for them, feeling too out of place in his own house to form words.

"Steve offered to drive of us over, so here we are."

"Oh." He feels them both looking at him, but he's never been the best at eye contact. Even before everything.

"You've missed a lot of school." Steve mentions causally after a long,

awkward pause.

“Mom and Will needed me.”

“Still,” Nancy interjects. “You should be there Monday. Get all your work this week so you can catch up over Christmas. We can help you.”

“That’s alright. I can probably figure it out.” He hates how quiet his voice is sometimes. His dad has always yelled at him about mumbling. It’s like he doesn’t know how to be heard unless he’s shouting.

“Come on, man. We want to help. We’ve both been dying for you to come back to school.”

His face must show his confusion because Steve is quick to explain. “It’s been weird. No one else knows, and...”

“And we both aren’t exactly running in the same circles anymore....” Nancy’s voice is distant.

“It’s like we all experienced something so much bigger than stupid Hawkins High School, and no one else can understand. We both are looking forward to having someone else to talk to.” Steve finishes her thought. They’ve only been with each other a couple weeks, and they already finish the other’s sentences.

It’s disgustingly cute.

He didn’t think they’d be interested in his presence budding in on their relationship. And he never thought they’d be feeling the isolation he’s felt everyday at that school. But considering where Steve left things with his friends, and the spray paint on the movie theater- he can get why things might have changed.

“Two people eating lunch together alone is sad. Three people is like a group.”

“I think it depends on who the third person is, Nancy.” Jonathan mutters, feeling embarrassed at the fact they are both still looking at him.

“The lady is right- we need you.” Steve’s statement lingers in the air between them as they quietly sit on the sofa. Coats still on in the freezing room that is slowly beginning to warm.

“Mom! Can I go over to Mike’s house?” Will breaks the moment by slamming out of his room, fully dressed and ready with Mike hot on his heels.

Jonathan feels his body tense at the question, and he knows his mom must be reacting the same way.

“That’s why we are here Mrs. Wheeler. Steve can drive us, and he can bring Will home if Jonathan can’t pick him up.”

“I can pick him up.” He’s not going to ever let Will come home without him. Never again.

“Please, can I, Mom?” Will looks the happiest and healthiest he’s been since coming back from that place. Jonathan can tell his mom’s resolve is crumbling.

“You’re sure you can pick him up?” She bites her lip, glancing between her two sons.

“Yeah, that interview is at five, I can easily swing by and get him around seven.”

“Seven?!” Mike sounds scandalized but Nancy shushes him with a glare.

“What interview?” Steve randomly interjects into their negotiations.

Jonathan feels his face flush, and sees his mom shift, looking embarrassed as well. They weren’t planning to advertise this.

“At the diner. Morning shift before school.” He mumbles, hoping Will isn’t paying too close of attention. He doesn’t want him to worry.

“If you’re going to go to the Wheeler’s, you gotta eat something. Come on, Mike, you too. Your mom feeds Will enough, you should have a sandwich.” The younger boys follow behind his mom, chattering about something to do with that game they play,

seemingly oblivious to the awkward shift in the room.

“Interview?” Nancy asks slowly once they clear into the kitchen.

“I... I mean...we need some extra cash.”

“How can you possibly work more?” Nancy whispers, her voice slightly rising and shooting a look at Steve that conveys some couple message he doesn’t understand.

“I don’t really have a choice. There are a lot of medical bills from the hospital. Mom’s looking for something else too. We don’t have insurance so...” he shrugs, wishing the monster could reappear just to drag him out of this conversation. That’s happening in front of Steve, of all people.

“You guys have to pay for that?” Steve is incredulous and looks angry, for whatever reason.

“Hopper’s been trying to make that place help, but Mom doesn’t trust them, and either way... we can’t wait.”

They’ll lose the house if they don’t stay on top of their minimum balances. But he’ll be damned if he tells them about their humiliating future at the Motel 6. It’s all they can manage to hide it from Will - and that’s without anyone else knowing.

Nancy starts to say something, but stop before any words come out.

“Hey kids, come get this coffee while it’s hot!”

“I’m gonna head out, Mom. I’ll be there at seven-thirty, Will!” Jonathan calls, needing to be away from Nancy’s worried glances and Steve’s pity eyes.

He rushes out the door, glad his coat was already on.

“Jonathan, wait!”

He turns, expecting Nancy, only to see Steve right behind him. “Come over to my house tomorrow.”

“What?”

“Nancy and I, we are watching the movie of the week. My parents are going to be at the club, so it should be slightly less lame than it sounds.”

“I have work.”

“You get out at four.”

Jonathan has no idea how he knows that, and he’s a little scared to ask. Attention has never been a positive thing for him, so Steve Harrington taking an interest in his life, however benign it appears, still makes him pause in alarm.

“Please say yes, Nance will be super pissed if I screwed this up.”

He stares for a long minute. If Nancy wants him there...

“Ok.”

The smile Steve gives at his acceptance makes his stomach tingle in a way he didn’t expect. He smiles back without realizing it, ducking his head shyly when Steve looks very pleased with himself.

“See you, tomorrow Byers.”

2. Chapter 2

Steve has a nice house. He knew that, obviously, but he never thought he'd be inside of it- seeing it up close in person as an invited guest.

He'd also never thought he'd sleep in Nancy Wheeler's bedroom. He doesn't seem to have a future in fortune telling.

"You want a pop?" Nancy knows her way around here. This place is familiar to her. It's comfortable.

It's a stark contrast to awkwardly huddling on an old couch in a living room that was like an icebox. The same living room where they'd fought a monster a month ago.

"I'm ok."

"Take the damn coke, Jonathan. It's not gonna bite you."

He takes it from her hand grudgingly. She is not taking his shit today.

"Who wants popcorn?" Steve pops out of the pantry as Nancy grabs another drink out of the fridge. Steve appears to be a root beer kinda guy if her selection is an indication.

"Everybody. Make two bags." Her eyes are like lazors, daring him to say no to Steve's offer. He wisely keeps his mouth shut.

"How'd the interview go?" Steve asks, overtly causal while they watch the seconds go by on the microwave clock.

"Fine."

Another ten seconds go by.

"God, Jonathan. Shut up, you don't need to go into so much detail. Just say if you got the job."

Nancy snorts while he blinks at Steve.

“I got the job.”

“Is this a congratulations moment? It doesn’t feel like one, but it also doesn’t not feel like one. Nance?”

“I’m not sure either.” She sounds upset, and he sneaks a long look at her. She’s biting her lip and meeting eyes with Steve. They do more of the silent communication.

“I think it’s just a whatever moment because it’s a whatever job.”

More eye talking. If only his parents could have fought like these two talk.

The loud beep of the microwave makes him jump.

“First bag’s ready!” Steve fiddles at the microwave. And the hands the popcorn to Nancy. “Why don’t you two get set up? The movie’s about to start.”

“What’s the movie?”

“The Ewok Adventure.” Nancy responds with a wry smile.

“Didn’t figure you and Steve for Star Wars fans.”

“It’s the only thing on, and with our brothers, I know we’ve both seen the source material.”

He shrugs. He’s not particular about what they watch.

She grabs a spot on one of the three couches in the room, if you count a loveseat, and Jonathan does. He goes to the one furthest from her, not wanting to appear like he’s invading on Steve’s girl.

“You expect me to throw the popcorn from four feet away and into your mouth?”

“It’d be impressive.”

“Get over here, loser.”

He makes sure to keep a foot away from her as he settles on the same

couch, taking a handful of popcorn from the bag.

“Do you see the remote?”

They search under a couple of cushions before finding it behind a pillow. She turns on the TV but keeps the volume on low. “When do you start at the diner?”

“Wednesday.” The popcorn tastes better than he expected. He didn’t realize how hungry he was. He takes a nervous sip of the coke.

“You want more?” She basically shoves the popcorn in his face so he takes another fistful.

“Thanks.”

“So you’re just going to go to work at the diner, spend eight hours at school, and then go to the burger place and work another shift?”

“Sometimes. I probably won’t work both jobs everyday, Nancy. People do stuff like this all the time. It’s just temporary.”

“Not people who want to go to New York for college.”

“Well...” He doesn’t have a response for that so he takes a longer drink from his pop.

“What’d I miss?” Steve has the other bag of popcorn, a bag of chips, and what looks like a pack of cookies. “Did you bring that root beer in here?”

“It’s on the coffee table.”

“You’re the best, babe.”

Jonathan would sound ridiculous if he tried to call Nancy ‘babe’. It sounds so natural coming out of Steve’s perfect mouth.

Casual affection, it’s such a foreign concept. It will never be like that for him.

“We haven’t actually been watching that closely. I believe here are

fury things and children, but the plot is more complicated than you'd think." Nancy takes the cookies as Steve settles in next to her on the other side of the sofa.

"They're separated from their parents. The Ewoks are trying to help find them." Jonathan says, eyes fixed firmly on the screen to avoid staring at them.

"Apparently, not that complicated." She says sarcastically and makes him take a cookie after she opens the package.

The three of them sit in silence for the next ten or so minutes. Nancy forces a variety of snack food down his throat with well-placed encouraging and forceful glances. It's all good though. Name brand snacks are better than he remembered. He hasn't had a real Dorito in months.

"So what are you going to do at the diner?" Steve breaks the silence during one of the longer commercial breaks.

These two are worse than his mother on the topic. It's both annoying and confusing.

"They need someone to help get the restaurant opened in the morning, kind of a busboy but a bit of a waiter too. Or I might help the cook. They have trouble keeping people for the early shift."

"What time do you have to be there?"

"Like four-thirty."

Steve gives a low whistle. "That stinks."

"It's just for a bit." He's not fond of the pity he's feeling coming off the two of them.

He's not upset by his life. He can't figure out why they would be.

"Hey Nance, wanna help me grab something from the kitchen?"

She nods, and they leave him alone with the movie, which he is actually finding pretty entertaining.

He gets so engrossed he forgets they're off talking about him until they return.

"So... we got you a Christmas present." Nancy's voice sounds weird so he looks up from the screen.

"Christmas is like over a week away."

"We like to celebrate early." She says cheerfully.

"I didn't get you guys anything." Jonathan never would have thought to get anything for Steve. But he could have been persuaded to find something for her.

"It's more of an apology gift that happens to be being given during the Christmas season." Steve says as Nancy pulls out a box from behind her.

A camera. A very nice camera. Nicer than the one Steve wrecked.

And everything suddenly shifts into place in his mind.

"Oh." He takes box. "Thanks."

'I'm really, really sorry about the way I acted. I was a complete jerk. I mean it wasn't cool what you did, but I really took the cake on kicking a guy when he was down. Not to mix my metaphors, but this is like the least I can do to make up for it, so please take it."

Well at least the motive is clear now. Why they were asking about him working, why they wanted to hang out tonight.

They feel guilty. Or Steve does.

Because he isn't a horrible guy. He doesn't want Jonathan to get a second job to pay for a camera Steve broke.

"It's fine. This is really great. Thanks again." He gives them both a smile. "I should probably get going. It's getting late."

"What?" Nancy checks the clock. "It's like nine."

"We have school. And my mom likes me home earlier now." He starts moving toward the door, feeling equal parts awkward and trapped.

"You don't have to go. The movie isn't even over." Steve says gesturing at the TV. "You were the only one even keeping up with it."

"They'll play it again." Where did he leave his coat? Kitchen, probably.

"Yeah, stay a bit longer, please?" She lightly touches his arm. A friendly gesture, but unnecessary.

"I'll see you guys at school." He left it by the door. They actually have a front entrance and a place for coats in this house.

They both actually follow him and watch him hastily put it on. The camera box hinders getting his hands through his sleeves.

This has to be the longest minute of his life.

"Well thanks for the invite and everything..." As he reaches for the door, seconds away from blissful alone time with his thoughts and this strange, new type of rejection- when one of them grabs his shoulder.

"Wait."

He turns, thinking Nancy will be there, but once again, he is surprised by Steve.

"I feel like, and correct me if I'm wrong here, I somehow insulted you with a gift and an apology. And I'm confused by that. Someone recently told me that I need to channel my confusion into communication and not automatically turn to rage and rejection. So Byers, where did I misstep here?"

Jonathat can't help but gape at him. Nancy seems equally stunned.

"You didn't, I mean I'm fine..." He mutters, feeling his face flush.

"Then why the mad dash away from me and my lady? We were having fun."

"I just thought... " He tries to choose his next words carefully, but they fall out of his mouth seemingly on their own. "You wanted me here to give me that camera. You got the camera because you felt bad about the diner. I have the camera so... I thought we were done here I guess..."

"Oh. well you're wrong. We want you here because Nancy is obsessed with you, and now I kinda am too. We are worried about the diner because any second you are working, is a second we cannot feed our obsession with your presence, which is a real bummer because we finally got you talking to us again. And I just was excited to give you the camera and couldn't wait any longer. And yeah, I didn't want you to spend any extra cash you earned on a new one that isn't as good. That clear things up?" Steve hasn't moved the hand from his shoulder.

He stands there staring, trying to process everything that was just said. "Obsessed with who?"

3. Chapter 3

“Obsessed might be an exaggeration. Deeply intrigued. And you’ve been playing mysterious very well, with the not coming to school for the last two weeks.”

Nancy, regaining her composure, rolls her eyes at Steve. “What he meant to say is, we want to be friends.”

“Oh.”

“So will you come inside, finish the movie, and agree to eat lunch with us for the next three remaining days before Christmas break?”

“I think the movie is probably over. “

“Fine, then just come inside and hang out a little longer.”

Jonathan stands on the porch for another long second. “Ok.”

“Great! More cookies for everybody.”

“Looked like Nancy ate them all.”

“Har, har Jonathan. Just get in here. It’s cold.”

“Yeah, I haven’t even given you the tour, and by tour I mean showing you my room. Which for some reason, I really want to do.”

He crosses back over the threshold, Nancy bullies him to take off his coat and places his camera carefully next it on a small table by the door.

Steve’s excitement is contagious as he leads them upstairs. He has that type of personality. When Steve is happy, everyone is happy.

He bounds up the steps, and while the two of them follow at a slower pace, Nancy’s hand suddenly intertwines in his much colder one.

Jonathan tries to pull away, nervously glancing at Steve’s back. Nancy just laughs. “He won’t mind.”

"Let's not test it." He mutters. The temptation of holding Nancy's hand seems to great to give in to.

"It's fine. I promise." With her encouragement, he lets his hand rest in hers for the rest of the trek down the hall.

"Wow." Jonathan is actually impressed with Steve's room. Or more specifically, the posters on Steve's walls. He never would have pegged him for a Bowie fan.

"Nancy said you wouldn't believe it unless you saw it yourself."

"I just thought you guys needed to see how much you have in common naturally, or you wouldn't believe it."

"I believed it!"

"Ok, Jonathan wouldn't believe it."

Steve snorts and drops on his bed. His large, double sized bed. That him and Nancy have....

Suddenly Jonathan is extremely uncomfortable. Why would they bring him here?

"Steve also has records."

The comment startles him out of his thoughts and peaks his interest.

"Really?"

"Yup, and a ridiculously nice record player." She gives him a knowing look.

"My parents buy my love. It's great. Go ahead and pick one out. They are in the crates by the bookshelf. I have everything."

He's not exaggerating. He must have over two-hundred of them. Everything from Madonna to Bob Seger. He puts on the latter. Not because it's his favorite, but it reminds him of his mom, and he hasn't heard Ramblin' Gamblin' Man in forever. His mom doesn't spend money on music for herself these days.

“You are a surprising creature, Byers. I never would have considered you a Seger fan.”

“He had a lot of good music before that movie.”

“I’m aware. Nancy here is a huge fan of Night Moves”

“Shut up, it’s got a lot of hidden meaning to it.”

Steve and Jonathan exchange fond smiles, and Jonathan ducks his head feeling a blush heat up his face once again.

He doesn’t know how Steve keeps making him blush, but it’s a disconcerting.

“You can sit down, you know.” Steve pats the spot next to him and Nancy on the bed.

“It’s ok, the floor is fine.” He drops down near the record player.

Steve may be the coolest guy in the world, but Jonathan isn’t stupid enough to get on a bed with another guy’s girl. Even if said guy is also there, which when he reflects on it, is a little weird.

They sit and listen to the album in the quiet for a while. His mom had dragged him and his dad to Michigan for one of Seger’s shows before Will was born.

It’s one of the few happy memories he has of them as a family.

But looking back on it, who takes a four year old to a rock concert? And his dad was obviously loaded the entire time.

“Deep thoughts over there?” Nancy’s voice drags him out of his painful memories, and he shakes them off with a sigh.

“No.”

She gets off the bed and grabs his hand, pulling him over to where Steve is watching them with heavy eyes.

“Nance...” Steve’s voice is sleepy, and Jonathan feels something low

in his gut and the sounds of it, slightly deeper than usual.

"It's fine. You'll both see." She pushes Jonathan on the bed and settles herself between them.

"I should get going," he whispers during the silence of a song change.

"Lay down for a minute." She pulls him down next to her. Steve's eyes have drifted shut when Jonathan resists slightly, checking to see what he thinks.

"Just listen to her, man." Steve's obviously halfway asleep and not paying them much attention.

She's insistent, and he find himself on his side, facing her. "Tell me how things really are. I know you're not being honest."

It's much harder to lie to her when they are so close, and she places a hand on the side of his face when he tries to turn away.

"They aren't too bad."

"Your house is still a mess. Your mom looked exhausted." Her voice is low, almost whispering.

"Burying a son is tiring, even if it turns out to not be him."

"I know."

"And there was a lot of damage, we've fixed some of it."

"It was so cold in there."

"That's a little better." He lies. Turns out the hole is only part of the problem. Their furnace is dying a slow death.

"Steve and I can help, you know."

"We don't need help."

"Well that's bullshit." Steve's voice is muddled but strong.

"Weren't you asleep?" Jonathan mutters bitterly, not liking their

sudden two on one.

“Not with the two of you whispering a foot away from me.”

“I can go.”

“Shut up, Byers. You’re not going anywhere.”

Jonathan breaks from Nancy’s gentle hand, still holding him. “What are we even doing?” He gets off the bed, backing up a couple steps.

“Being friends. I thought we established that downstairs.” Steve responds causally. Too casually.

“I think we have different definitions of friendship.” He says, confused.

“See Nancy, that’s why I said we go slow. But no, you’re dragging him into bed halfway through one record.”

“What are you guys talking about?” He can’t help but send Nancy a betrayed look. This feels like the start of a joke where he ends up as the punchline.

“I don’t like obfuscating.” She says primly.

“Bullshit. You’re impatient.” Steve’s tone is more fond than accusing. But then he reaches out and grabs Jonathan hand in his much larger one.

He freezes in shock at the contact, looking down to where Steve interlocks their fingers. “We want to be more than friends with you.”

Jonathan blinks. Still stunned that they are touching.

“Nancy came to me three weeks ago, an emotional wreck.”

“Hey!”

“Shhh. We are talking here, babe.”

Nancy lightly punches his arm, but allows him to keep going.

"Where was I? Oh yes, broken-hearted she was. And she comes to me to say she can't be with me, even though she is deeply attracted to my entire being. And why was I a Montague to her Capulet? Because of you, Byers."

Jonathan looks at Nancy, who bites her lip nervously.

"She couldn't commit to me because she has feelings for you. Same reason she couldn't commit to you- because of her feelings for me. So I told her, being the problem solver I am, that I would make this work."

Steve's thumb is now rubbing across the back of his hand. A part of him wants to pull away, but another, an almost stronger part, wants to get closer to the feeling their contact is sparking in him.

"I told her, 'Nance, we can kill two birds with one stone, or more accurately, one monster with one bat.'"

Nancy laughs and grabs Jonathan's other hand, dragging him back onto the bed, but this time between them. He almost runs right then, but then she slides her hand through his hair, "Keep listening. He's getting to the good part."

"Am I?"

"Steve."

"Right. So first I thought, I'm a giving guy, I can just share Nancy'- that way she doesn't feel pressured to pick between us."

Nancy keeps stroking his hair, and he thinks he might pass out, especially considering Steve is holding his hand in a way that feels like the most sexual thing he's ever done, mostly because it is.

"I planned that out for a while, thought about how it could or couldn't work. And I start confronting the fact, began picturing the two of you together. And I found myself feeling jealous. A little bit because you'd be with Nancy, but after further reflection I realized, it was also about Nancy having you. Getting to keep you all to herself."

Jonathan tenses at the confession, turning to Steve in shock.

“So it turns out, we have to figure out how to share you.”

4. Chapter 4

"I'm not gay." He replies while laying on Steve's bed and holding Steve's hand.

"No one said anything about being gay." Steve responds darkly.

"Do you know what gay means?"

"Yeah, it means I wouldn't like fucking Nancy, which I do immensely. And I'm pretty sure you will too."

"Boys..." Nancy is stern, interrupting Jonathan's rebuttal.

He suddenly notices the music has stopped playing. The album must have finished. It's gotta be late. "I guess I'm just confused. I don't get what you're saying."

"We want you to be ours. Both of us."

He's even more confused by the possessive pronoun Nancy's used. "Yours?"

"Well yeah, so it's fair. You can't just be mine." She says it so matter of factly it makes him doubt his own confusion.

When was he going to be Nancy's?

Steve's hand is still holding his, and he can admit he's not adverse to the feeling. He can even admit that he finds Steve... attractive is probably the most accurate word.

But he's never really imagined them touching or being intimate. Not like he has with Nancy, who he's fantasized about in great detail.

"The way I see it Byers, is it comes down to personality. Nancy and I have personalities where giving up control is difficult. I don't think you have the same hang up, am I right?"

Before he can respond, Steve has grabbed his other hand and pushed them both above his head. Nancy shifts so she can watch them with

wide, attentive eyes.

“I...” The words get stuck in his throat.

“That’s what I thought. And that works for all of us.” Steve smells better than anyone ever should, and he drops a kiss on Jonathan’s head. “We can work out the details later.”

He releases his hands, but Jonathan doesn’t lower them from where they were placed, still too overwhelmed to move.

A slow grin spreads across Steve’s face, “Yeah, this is going to work just fine.”

A second later, the sound of the front door closing downstairs causes them all to sit up and move away from each other. The heavy atmosphere is broken, and Jonathan doesn’t even get to dwell over that last comment because he’s straightening his hair and clothes single mindedly. He’s not looking to get caught in whatever this is, especially by Steve’s parents.

“Want me to take Nancy home?”

“No, my parents don’t know she’s here, and her parents think she’s at Cathy’s. She’s gonna stay over. Let me walk you out, that way I can say goodnight, and they won’t come check on me.”

As they head to the door, Nancy puts her arms around him. “Don’t over think this,” she whispers and kisses him softly on the cheek. “I want to see you in school tomorrow.”

“Yeah.”

“Don’t ‘yeah’ me. We’ll come find you.”

“I’ll be there.” He lies smoothly. He’s not sure why it’s a lie, but he knows he’s not going. He makes sure to give her a small squeeze. “You don’t have to worry about me, you know.”

“All evidence points to that being incorrect, Jonathan.” Steve comes up behind him, and his hand lingers over the nape of his neck, causing goosebumps to cover his arms. “You are a worry magnet.”

"I don't want you to, but you should go. His parents probably are wondering whose car it is." She acts like it's physically painful to see him leave. Like she thinks it's the last time they'll see each other.

"You know I want you to stay right?"

"He knows, Nancy."

She reaches out again, and he takes her hand. "I know. It's ok. Tomorrow, right?" He reassures her.

Her face relaxes at his words which makes him feel more guilty. He'll make it up to her.

"Let's head out." Steve grabs Jonathan's other hand and pulls him through the door.

The two of them head down the stairs, Steve keeping them joined until the last possible second, causing Jonathan's face to be a burning flame when they run into his father.

"Heya Stevo, who's your friend?"

"Hey Dad, this is Jonathan."

"That your car out there?"

He nods, too nervous to think of a response.

Steve's dad is an imposing figure, but he seems jovial. And Steve acts pretty calm, not nervous like Will is around their dad. This guy must be safe enough.

"I'm gonna go. Nice meeting you, sir."

"Sure thing, son. Your mother is in the kitchen, Steve. Make sure to say goodnight after walking your friend out. She wanted to ask you about dinner next weekend with Nancy."

"Sure thing, Pops."

Jonathan grabs his coat and pulls it on before picking up the new

camera. He checks his keys are in his pocket.

“Thank for having me over.” He says lowly.

“Stop being weird. We’ll say goodbye outside.” Steve is making a habit of just taking his hand like it belongs to him.

But they’re not being gay?

Steve pulls him over to his car. “I didn’t want to do this with the added pressure of Wheeler eyes.” He maneuvers them easily and pushes Jonathan’s back against the driver side door, forcing him to look up to see Steve’s eyes.

His eyes are really blue. Like Nancy’s.

“You ok?” He asks softly as they stand in the snow, their bodies touching.

“Yeah.” Jonathan replies, his heart suddenly racing.

Of all the things he thought would happen tonight, this never crossed his mind.

He wonders why he’s not more freaked out. And maybe that will come later. It’s always been there though. This. But it’s not something he ever had to acknowledge because he likes Nancy. And he liked Rhonda in middle school.

He’s just ignored it.

When Steve’s other hand comes up and brushes into his hair, grabbing him- he braces himself. Their mouths come together in a gasping breath. It causes arousal to suddenly flash through him like a lightning rod. They don’t kiss for longer than thirty seconds before Steve pulls back, but regardless, he’s seeing stars.

“Have you ever done that?”

He shakes his head, still panting.

“Good.”

Jonathan tries to pinpoint the tone in Steve's voice, it's part smug and part relieved.

"I like that we'll be your first. Nancy will too. She let me have this, but she's got a whole list of things she's claiming."

Steve squeezes the hand he's still holding, and the hand in his hair squeezes at the base of his neck. "She will literally lose it if you're not in school tomorrow. Be there, Byers."

He kisses him again, softly this time, before letting him go and turning back toward the house.

"She'll be calling your house in fifteen minutes. Make sure you pick up." He says over his shoulder as Jonathan opens his car door.

"Our phone isn't working."

Steve turns around. "Why not?"

Explaining his mom's attempted destruction of the phone, and the terror she experiences whenever it rings seems like a lot for the moment.

"We need a new one."

They can still make calls, kind of. But the only person they've really called is Hop, and if they don't pick up, he just drives over.

"Send a smoke signal then."

"Bye, Steve." He climbs into the car, then backs out slowly over the ice.

Steve stays outside, watching him, until he finally turns out of the driveway and can't see his figure any longer.

5. Chapter 5

The car ride home feels longer than the ten minutes it is. He can't stop thinking about what just happened.

Steve Harrington kissed him. Nancy Wheeler had feelings for him.

It sounds like someone else's life.

The heat in his car only works half the time. It's like the powers that be are conspiring against the Byers family ever being warm. He pulls up to his house. All of the lights are off, and he relaxes.

He feels nervous when he's gone for too long.

"Hey."

"Will? What are you doing out here?"

Will is sitting on the couch when he walks through the front door.

"I couldn't sleep."

"Well it's gotta be warmer in your room. Mom and I didn't really make things that much better out here, and she put that space heater in there."

Will shrugs. "I didn't really notice."

Jonathan steps over to him, feeling worried. His brother's eyes are distant, and he looks pale.

"Will?" He can't help the slight tinge of panic that enters his voice.

He continues to stare at Jonathan unblinkingly until he reaches out and touches his shoulder. Suddenly, it's like he snaps out of whatever trance he was in.

"Jonathan?"

"It's me, Will."

“Why are we in the living room?”

“You were here when I came home. Don’t you remember?”

Will tired face is furrowed in confusion.

“Sleepwalking! You must have been sleepwalking.” Jonathan can’t help but exclaim, relaxing internally and externally at his realization.

“Oh. I didn’t know I did that.”

A sinking feeling returns to Jonathan’s stomach. “You usually don’t.”

Will shrugs again, and he get up from the couch. “What time is it?”

“Late. Let’s get you get back to bed. You have school tomorrow.”

“So do you.”

“Yeah yeah, not you too.”

He tucks his brother back into his bed, ignoring the slightly annoyed, “I can do it myself.” Will mutters, but not unkindly.

Apparently, this twelve year old is getting frustrated with the coddling. He can’t help watching his brother’s eyes drift shut after he kicks off one of his blankets. The room is considerably warmer with the space heater, but it doesn’t feel that warm. He hopes Will isn’t coming down with anything.

Back in his room, he collapses on his bed, exhausted. He feels like he’s been tired for a month. For the week after Will was back, he kept waking up in the middle of the night, convinced his brother was dead. He couldn’t ever seem to fall back asleep after that.

He’s pretty sure his mom is going through something similar. He can hear her moving around in the kitchen before dawn every morning. They haven’t talked about it.

A part of him is scared that if they ever do talk, it will be allowing Will’s death back into reality. The life their living now will crack

"Telling me not to worry at this point is basically like painting a big sign on the wall that says 'WORRY NOW, JOYCE'".

"Mom."

"Fine. I get it. But promise me you'll go tomorrow?"

"Yes, Mom."

"Sweetie, you have the same tell as your father. We'll talk about this when I get home. Can you finish Will's lunch? I got the sandwich made but not anything else."

"Got it."

The next hour goes by with their normal routine, except he doesn't leave for school and drops Will off early.

Afterwards he doesn't go to the diner. He doesn't go home either.

Jonathan doesn't know what's keeping him from school. But that fact is, the thought of walking through those doors makes him sick to his stomach with anxiety.

He left the new camera in his car when he went inside last night. He stops in a park outside town and fiddles with it for the next hour. It's different than the one he'd had and slightly more complicated, but he can tell already that it's much nicer.

He gets so distracted by it, he doesn't notice the police truck pull in next to him until Hop taps on his window, causing his heart to nearly jump out of his chest.

"Come on out, kid."

"Hey." He mumbles after sliding out the car slowly.

"What are you doing out here?" Hop always sounds vaguely exasperated. Right now, it's not sounding vague at all.

"I'm just..." He trails off. He was hoping an excellent excuse for this would magically appear in his mind. It has not.

"I have a lot on my plate right now. Fielding calls from Nancy Wheeler panicking about where you are is not something I have time for."

"Nancy called the police?"

"No. Nancy called your mom. And the diner. Then she called me. I'm not sure if you're all aware of this, but I am the Chief of Police."

"She called Mom?"

"She did. And your mom has not been taking it calmly that you are not where you said you would be. For obvious reasons."

"Fuck."

"Fuck is right." Hopper reaches into the pocket of his jacket and pulls out a cigarette. "So what's going on?" He lights it and takes a drag.

"I don't know." He leans back against his car, suddenly feeling defeated. And tired.

"Any reason you're not going to school? Other kids giving you a hard time?"

Only always. But that's not the reason he's been avoiding going. "No, they're fine."

"Sure they are, kid." Hop takes another drag. "But if that's not it, why isn't your ass there?"

Jonathan's dream has always been pretty straightforward. Go to school, take photographs, get decent grades, and get a scholarship to go to NYU. He doesn't know exactly what he wants to be, but he thought in New York City, he'd be able to figure it out.

That isn't his future now. He can't leave here. He stayed for one extra shift at his job, and he nearly lost his entire family.

And if he's not going to NYU, what's the point of being miserable at school?

"I guess I don't see the point anymore."

"The point of what?" The Chief asks after another long drag.

"Going to school, doing my homework, all of it."

"No one does, kid. It's just what you do. You're mom wants you to get that diploma, so you get it. You don't need another reason, half the kids in that school don't have another reason."

"I used to. It seems stupid now."

Hopper sighs. "Yeah, I get that. You went through a lot. So did your mom and your brother. Things are going to feel wrong for awhile. I'd like to tell you it will all get easier because it does. But I've learned that's something you have to realize on your own."

He doesn't respond.

"When my daughter died, I lost hope in a lot of things. Dreams I had for her, and the dreams I had for myself." Hopper deep voice is low. There is a sadness there that should have been foreign to Jonathan. Except now- it isn't.

"You and your mom buried your brother. And you, you truly believed he was gone. I'm not one of those head quacks, but I know this. You can take all the time you need to learn how to carry that." He pauses, exhaling a cloud of smoke. "Just make sure that after you've figured it out, you haven't done something to your life you can't undo." After one final drag, Hop throws the butt into the snow.

Steve said Nancy would freak out if he wasn't at school. He'd promised her he'd be there. She's probably mad at him.

His mom is gonna be a mess when he sees her.

He's missed school for weeks.

They stand in silence for another long minute. Snow starts to fall, and he takes a breath.

"Hop?"

“Yeah kid?”

“There’s something wrong with Will.”

6. Chapter 6

He heads back toward town, listening to the radio half-heartedly. He needs to remember to bring his newer tapes to the car.

Hop had sent him to school.

Of course he had. Jonathan hadn't even known what he was saying about Will, why would anyone take him seriously.

At least Hop said he'd look into it. But that had been on the condition Jonathan got his ass back to where it should be.

He can make it, but the ride to school is anxiety ridden.

The thought of seeing Nancy and Steve makes his face heat up and stomach tighten.

They are going to be mad at him. Nancy calling his mom and getting Hop involved doesn't bode well for her reaction to him not being there this morning.

He shouldn't care if they are angry at him, but he does. Whatever happened between them last night has made him nervous, and it makes him feel awkward and out of place to think of it. But it also makes him hopeful...of what he doesn't know. He just knows it scares him.

As he pulls in the parking lot, he almost turns around. If Hop hadn't threatened him with truancy, he would have.

He didn't even bother bringing his backpack this morning, hopefully he left a spare notebook in his locker so he won't look like a total idiot.

Jonathan eases his way through the side door, wanting to avoid a stop at the front offices. The secretary asks a lot of questions.

His locker is mostly empty, but he manages to find an old pencil and a mostly used notebook. The warning bell rings, and a glance at the hallway clock tells him it's the start of fourth period.

Fuck. One of the only two classes he has with Nancy. He briefly considers skipping, but then he's back where he started. Hop probably already told his mom he sent him back to school so if the school or Nancy calls- she'll have a coronary.

Nancy's standing at the door, and Steve is with her. She is definitely mad. Mad is putting it lightly. Nancy is furious. And Steve doesn't look much happier when he ducks past them into AP History right as the final bells rings.

She follows him in and luckily class is starting, and there isn't time for her to say anything. She sits down in the seat that's usually vacant next to him, and he spends the next forty-five minutes trying not to feel her gaze.

For not being in class for weeks, he's actually done fairly well keeping up with the work that was sent home. Not that he can really focus, but the notes he's taking are familiar.

When the bell rings, he makes a break for the door. It's easy to take off when he only has a pencil and notebook.

"Jonathan!" He hears Nancy call after him. He doesn't turn around, keeping his head down and scared to see her.

He's not ready to face whatever she has to say. He's barely ready to face much of anything lately.

Unfortunately, his decision to book it didn't take into account that Nancy is currently part of a pair. A fact he quickly remembers when he runs straight into Steve's chest after taking three steps out of the classroom.

"Hey Byers." Steve's voice is low, hitting Jonathan in his gut with longing.

"Hey." He mutters in response, backing away from their close proximity. Nancy is standing behind him now, and there is no way he can make an escape without making a weird scene. And he has enough people staring at him these days.

"You have lunch now, right?"

“Yeah.” His voice is embarrassingly quiet at this point.

“Awesome. So does Nance, and I have a free period. Let’s go.”

Nancy makes an abortive move, and he thinks she was going to grab him somehow before thinking better of it.

Her boyfriend is Steve.

Jonathan’s just some guy, and considering how strange this is, it’s probably better things stay that way.

Steve doesn’t lead them to the cafeteria like he expects, but surprisingly enough, to the mostly empty library.

They slip past Mrs. Wilkerson, who is reading a romantic novel and eating a tuna fish sandwich at her desk, barely acknowledging their presence.

By the time Steve stops, they are deep in the stacks in what looks like a poorly labeled Native American/Astronomy section.

“We never get bothered here.” Nancy sits down, and starts pulling things out of her backpack. She seems less angry now, if overly focused.

Steve joins her on the floor, and Jonathan stands back from them, unsure and feeling more than a little like he doesn’t belong here, wherever here is.

“I’ll chase after you if I have to, take a seat Byers.” Steve doesn’t sound annoyed, but his voice is definitely different from the low, heated tones of last night.

He sits about a foot away from them, his back propped up on the stack behind him.

“Here.” Nancy hands them both a sandwich from her bag and takes some sort of burrito thing for herself. “It’s ham and cheese, Steve’s favorite, you’ll have to tell me yours for tomorrow.”

“This is fine,” he mumbles holding it in his hands. A little confused

about why she's going to be making his lunch tomorrow too.

"She wants you to eat it, babe, not look at it."

Jonathan's head snaps up at the endearment, feeling his face turning red, but Steve is busy eating and doesn't even seem to notice his reaction.

He slowly unwraps the seran wrap and takes a tentative bite. It's good- she uses both mayo and mustard, which is how he likes it.

They eat quietly for a few minutes before Nancy puts down the burrito thing with a look of determination on her face.

"Where were you?"

He swallows, unable to meet her eyes that look way more upset than he can handle.

"I got went to the diner after dropping off Will, and then I guess, I just...I don't know." He gives up on eating the second half of the sandwich suddenly feeling full.

"What don't you know?" Steve's voice is causal, but there is still that edge to it. "You said you'd be here. Nancy needed to you to show up."

"Steve." Her voice is stern.

"Come on, Nance. I'm being honest. I'm not angry, I just want him to talk to us."

"I'm sorry," he says softly, starting at the title of the book in front of him. *A Guide to the Stars* sounds nice. Will would like that.

"You told be you'd be here." She whispers, and he has to look at her now. The sadness in her voice causing him physical pain. "Barb didn't show up at school either."

There it is, like a blow. He's hurt her, and he didn't even realize how badly. He should have because he should have remembered.

The urge to run from this feeling is overwhelming, and Steve must recognize it because he reaches out and grabs Jonathan, pulling him in between them on the floor. His sandwich falls, but Steve doesn't appear to care.

"It's ok, baby. Don't freak out, we were just worried." Nancy whispers into his ear, and Jonathan realizes how hard he's breathing.

"I didn't mean..." He can't even finish it. He did mean it. He didn't want to see them. Or he did, but he didn't know how to deal with what he felt, and with everything...

He just wanted to sit in his car and play with a new camera.

"I know you didn't. It's me. I just worry all the time now. I call Steve almost five times a day. His mom thinks I'm crazy."

"She does not. She understands." Steve murmurs, reaching over Jonathan to take her hand.

Jonathan hopes they were right about no one ever coming back here because it would be hard to explain this away.

"You just... I know what we're doing is new and scary, but you can't disappear on me." He turns to look at her, meeting her eyes. Before he realizes what's happening, she's leaned in and is kissing him.

Where Steve's kiss was warm and heated, her's is soft and commanding. It's something he's thought of many times, especially recently, but his imagination never did it justice.

As they break apart, Steve lets out a whistle. "I don't want to encourage you to worry her, but that is the hottest thing I've ever seen."

He ducks his head in embarrassment as Steve chuckles.

"We need to talk more than the next fifteen minutes are going to allow." She says gently.

"I have to get Will after school."

“Can we come over?”

His first instinct is to say no. The house is still freezing, but he doesn't feel like they'll take no for an answer. Not without questions, and he's not the greatest at lying.

“My mom gets out of work at 8pm. She's working a double.”

“Maybe you can drop Will with Mike, and we'll meet you at your place?”

She wants privacy. That makes him nervous. But it's a good plan, Will wanted to go over there anyway, and he said he'd think about it. He can drive them both, and easily pick him up before their mom gets home.

The fact the Wheelers will feed his brother is also a bit of a relief. Grocery money's been tight.

“Ok.”

Steve drops a kiss on his cheek. “Good boy, I know that was hard.”

Jonathan doesn't know how he knows that, but the gentle praise comes with a jolt of pleasure.

“Finish your sandwich.” Nancy grabs it from the ground next to them. “Lucky it was wrapped.”

The three of them stay side by side, eating and talking about *Christine* of all things. He hasn't seen it, but they both have.

“Well go see it again. It's good, scary but not real scary. So I think we'd all be ok.” Nancy gives his hand another squeeze as the bell rings.

They all scramble to pick up the trash. As he makes his move to lead them out, Steve grabs him once more, pulling him into a long, lingering kiss.

“After school, Byers.” He says. It's as much as a command as it is a promise.

He's not sure what that promise is, but he's curious to find out.